

# Toward an Enduring Ceasefire: Preventing the Rocket Rearmament of Gaza Terrorist Groups

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Brief Analysis

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**A group of weapons experts and former officials outlines practical steps for ensuring that Hamas and other militants do not rebuild their rocket forces, jeopardize reconstruction efforts, or spark another major conflict.**

*In launching the most recent wave of rockets into Israel, some Hamas leaders have promised never to return to Egypt-mediated ceasefire talks. But "never" is a long time in the Middle East, and it still makes sense to lay the groundwork now for the components of an enduring ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. High on the list of priorities are measures to prevent Hamas and other terrorist groups from replenishing their rocket arsenals. Toward that end, The Washington Institute recently convened a closed-door gathering of former U.S. and foreign officials, rocket specialists, and a former UN weapons inspector. The group explored ways to deal with the rocket problem in Gaza and examined how the concept of "reconstruction for demilitarization" might be implemented as part of a long-term ceasefire agreement. The following is a summary of their main findings. Note that some of the figures cited below may have changed in light of the fighting that has occurred since the latest ceasefire collapsed.*

Since 2001, the Gaza rocket problem has only worsened; more than 18,000 have been fired at Israel over the past several years, and their range has increased from just a few kilometers to more than 160. Rocket and mortar fire has become a strategic tool for Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Resistance Committees (henceforth "Hamas et al."). By precipitating numerous clashes and contributing to three large-scale military confrontations since Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, such fire has enabled these groups to exercise a veto within the

Palestinian arena and vis-a-vis Israel. The repeated salvos also disrupt life in much of Israel and hold the potential to trigger even greater conflicts. And while Israel's Iron Dome defense system has a 90 percent interception rate, some rockets still get through.

Constraining the ability of Hamas et al. to fire rockets at Israel is therefore key to preventing another conflict that could cost numerous civilian lives and lay waste to infrastructure and lodging built with billions of dollars in reconstruction assistance. For the first time, key international actors -- including the U.S. government and the European Union -- are on record calling for the disarmament of Gaza as an essential precondition for averting another military confrontation and permitting the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure.

## **ROCKET INVENTORY AND USE**

Israel assesses that Hamas et al. had 10,000 rockets of various types before the latest conflict, with perhaps 400 having a range of more than 80 km. About a third (roughly 3,500) have been expended, a third were destroyed by Israeli strikes, and a third remain intact (including 100-200 of the longest-range weapons) -- though Hamas claims it has continued to produce rockets during the conflict. The Gaza arsenal includes short-, medium- and long-range systems:

- Short-range (4-16 km): Qassam-type rockets made in home workshops and Iranian 107 mm Katyusha-type rockets
- Medium-range (20-40 km): Iranian versions of the BM-21 Grad
- Long-range (50-160 km): locally produced rockets such as the S-55, M-75, J-80, R-160, and Buraq-70, as well as the Iranian Fajr-5 and Syrian M-302

About half of the rockets fired thus far have been short-range weapons that landed 4-5 km from the border with Gaza. In addition, Hamas et al. have made extensive use of imported 120 mm mortars (7 km range). Although rockets have been launched from all over the Strip, the greatest concentration of launch sites is in and around Gaza City.

The overwhelming majority of rockets used have been locally produced models, and Israel assesses that it has destroyed 50-60% of Gaza's rocket production facilities. In the past, foreign-produced rockets were smuggled through tunnels from the Sinai Peninsula, or by floating containers dumped into the sea off the coast. Yet Hamas et al. have had great difficulty importing rockets through the southern tunnels since the July 2013 military ouster of Muhammad Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. Moreover, many locally made rockets are still dependent on imported materials and components: nozzle assemblies, propellant ingredients (the sugar and potassium nitrate mixture previously used has largely been abandoned for more energetic propellants), military-grade explosives for warheads, and fuse assemblies. These are vulnerabilities, as is the reliance on carefully constructed and camouflaged subterranean launch pits (many of which house multiple tube launchers) and truck-mounted launchers for long-range rockets.

## **PREVENTING REARMAMENT**

The concept of "demilitarization for reconstruction" is an important political objective, progress toward which should guide ceasefire negotiations. In the near term, however, a more viable goal should be to prevent Hamas et al. from rearming and rebuilding their military capabilities -- with particular emphasis on their rocket forces -- while dismantling those capabilities that pose a risk to public safety or reconstruction efforts. This should be viewed as a first step toward the disarmament and eventual demilitarization of Gaza. In this regard, the two main pillars of limiting the rocket threat are (1) halting the smuggling of rocket components, and (2) dismantling the rocket launcher network in Gaza.

Postconflict arrangements concerning Gaza border crossings and internal reconstruction should explicitly prohibit

smuggling and the unregulated import of materials and equipment that could abet the rebuilding of rocket forces. They should also specify measures that will necessarily result in the neutralization of exposed rocket launchers and prevent the construction of new launchers. The following arrangements would go far toward achieving these ends:

1. If the Egyptian border crossing at Rafah is opened to help ease restrictions on Gaza, the relevant provisions of the Agreement on Access and Movement (AMA) -- a 2005 accord between Israel and the Palestinian Authority -- should be updated to account for advances in border security techniques and technologies. Moreover, customs personnel would need to be augmented by specialists who can recognize rocket components and related materials. Should customs authorities at Rafah prove unable to meet the required standards, the crossing would remain closed until these standards could be met.
2. A PA role in Gaza is essential to reconstruction, but it should be conditioned on a formal reaffirmation of the PA's longstanding commitment to "one authority, one law, one gun." In practical terms, this would commit the PA to playing a key support role in all efforts to both prevent the rearming of Hamas et al. and dismantle their military capabilities. The eventual goal would be for the PA to assume a lead role as it gains skills, experience, and the capacity to act.
3. PA personnel should man the Palestinian side of all border crossings, augmented by trained customs personnel from the EU and Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco. The presence of these foreign personnel would hopefully ensure the professionalism of border security operations at Rafah (until PA personnel were able to assume these responsibilities on their own) and encourage the PA to engage in activities that are liable to elicit the opprobrium of Hamas et al.
4. Strict controls should be placed on dual-use items and materials to prevent their diversion for proscribed activities, including end-use monitoring and verification procedures involving PA and international inspectors. Failure to prevent diversion should disqualify the culpable companies or other entities from participating in future reconstruction activities, thus incentivizing them to comply with the controls.
5. The disbursement of reconstruction funds and building permits should be contingent on international inspectors completing a detailed survey of all areas within 500 meters of proposed project sites, to identify unexploded ordnance as well as tunnels and rocket launchers that could endanger future occupants. (In military terms, this distance is generally considered the minimum needed to ensure that individuals are not "danger close" to potential air or artillery strikes.) Ordnance should be cleared and tunnels/launchers rendered unusable before work is allowed to begin, with violations resulting in immediate suspension of all work within a 500-meter radius of the infraction. Such inspections should be prescribed for the life of a structure repaired or built as part of the reconstruction effort. A large presence of PA personnel and international inspectors overseeing reconstruction throughout Gaza should also help constrain terrorist efforts to rebuild missile infrastructure and rearm. Finally, a telephone and email tip line should be set up so that Palestinians can report the presence of unexploded ordnance, military tunnels, and rockets/launchers to international reconstruction authorities and the PA.
6. The disbursement of reconstruction funds should be linked to maintenance of the ceasefire. Violation of its terms by any group in Gaza should trigger an automatic thirty-day freeze on disbursements. The threat of a thirty-day freeze would have a greater deterrent effect than a longer penalty period, such as six months -- the prospects of a rapid return to business as usual would incentivize the PA to prevent breakdowns (since too-frequent disruptions would chase foreign donors and contractors away), while a longer freeze would be seen as too punitive. An independent international commission should be set up to assess the facts regarding alleged ceasefire violations.
7. The United States should create a tailored intelligence sharing mechanism to support this effort, starting with Israel and Egypt and gradually expanding to include all participants (the PA, EU states, and Arab states).
8. Washington should likewise step up efforts to help Egypt improve its security capabilities along its borders with Libya,

Sudan, and Gaza, enabling Cairo to interdict the smuggling of arms that would otherwise make their way to Hamas et al.

9. The United States and the international community should more proactively enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1929 and other resolutions that proscribe Iranian arms transfers. This means supporting the interdiction of arms shipments en route to Gaza and imposing diplomatic and economic sanctions for violations of the resolution.

Finally, even if it is not possible at this time, demilitarization should remain a declared goal of international efforts in Gaza. Washington and its partners in reconstruction should emphasize repeatedly to local residents that tangible progress toward demilitarization is crucial -- without it, the lives of thousands of Palestinians will be in jeopardy, and outside actors will never see Gaza as a worthwhile destination for billions of dollars in reconstruction funds, let alone investment opportunities. And if another destructive conflict erupts because of a failure to disarm Hamas et al. and demilitarize Gaza, then these same residents should not expect the international community to pay for and assist with yet another reconstruction effort.

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